

Testimony of

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Peterson, and distinguished members of the committee. Welcome to Canandaigua and New York's beautiful Finger Lakes region. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding my family's fruit farm and federal farm policy.

My family immigrated to this area from Long Island in 1958. At the time my grandparents owned a turkey farm there but as a result of urban sprawl eminent domain purchased their property to build an off-ramp for one of Robert Moses' parkways. For that I am somewhat grateful for I feel much more comfortable among the fruit trees in our orchards than I think I would in a birdhouse full of toms.

Red Jacket Orchards is a 500 acre fruit farm operated by my twin brother, Brian, sister, Amy, father, Joe, and myself. We primarily grow fresh market apples but over the past 10 years have diversified into specialty stone fruits such as apricots and Japanese plums, as well as berry crops. We also press apple cider and other 100 percent fruit juices in our juice mill. The majority of our fruit and value added products are marketed and sold wholesale in the Northeast, with a special emphasis in metro New York, as well as in our retail store in Geneva.

Priorities

On one level the priority for our business and what we seek from federal farm policy is simple. The top priority for any business is to generate adequate profitability to sustain operations and provide capital to grow and change to meet an ever-evolving marketplace. But, as we all know, the devil is in the details, and agriculture is fraught with details. Given the hours of enlightened testimony this committee has received I will not go into exhaustive detail as to what I feel is wrong with agriculture today. Rather, I would like to focus my comments on how best to craft federal farm policy in a manner that positively impacts my family business's top priority, which is our bottom line.

The U.S. fruit and vegetable industry in this country operates in a free market system, and I strongly believe we are better for this. Generating a profit in this industry, however, has never been more challenging due to many factors for which I am sure you are more than aware. It is my hope this committee recognizes the unique challenges specialty crop producers face in remaining viable in the new global marketplace, and that this knowledge and understanding translates into effective farm policy that will guide us to 2012 and beyond.

Federal farm policy will greatly benefit apple producers and the fruit and vegetable sectors if the following priorities are taken into consideration during its formulation over the coming months.

1. Fruit and vegetable consumption must be expanded in this country with an emphasis on battling the obesity epidemic and improving overall individual health.
2. Investment in specialty crop research must be increased in order to provide the resources needed to survive in a rapidly evolving, global marketplace.

Expand consumption of fruits and vegetables... and improve lifelong health

We must seek to positively influence consumers eating habits by encouraging them to meet the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, and we must do it at an early enough age that these positive consumption patterns can increase their lifelong health. To achieve this, the 2007 Farm Bill should include a **Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Promotion Program**. This is a win for U.S. fruit and vegetable producers because it has the potential to develop lifelong consumers for our products. It is a win for U.S. consumers because the long-term health benefits of proper eating are well documented. And, it is a win for the federal government because this may be the most cost effective way to mitigate the obesity and related health crisis that continues to drastically escalate health care costs in this country.

Another important program that enhances specialty crop competitiveness and helps expand fruit and vegetable consumption is **Block Grant Programs** administered by state departments of agriculture. These successful programs have a proven track record of assisting the diverse and

unique needs of specialty crop industries in each state. My family's operation was fortunate to have received marketing funds through New York's "Pride of NY" program, which was funded by federal block grants. These funds were critical to our development of a marketing program for products that often compete with imports and helped us expand markets for our apples and specialty crops in the Metro NY region. The State's administration of the program provided greater flexibility and ease of use due to its familiarity with our local industry and marketplace needs. In addition to funding specialty crop marketing, these funds have been used in other critical areas such as education and research activities.

Other federal programs that can greatly assist fruit and vegetable growers expand consumption and influence healthy eating are the **School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program**, **DOD Fresh Program** and **Food Stamps**. In the case of the first two, these again present win-win opportunities for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption while also having a positive and long lasting impact on healthy eating, and should be greatly expanded. With regard to Food Stamps we support enhancing nutrition education and buying programs that encourage increasing fruit and vegetable consumption by recipients.

Finally, as apple producers we support the **Market Access Program (MAP)**. Although we are not directly involved in exporting apples we greatly benefit when adequate stocks of U.S. grown apples are sent abroad and this program has been very successful in leveling the international playing field.

Tools to survive in a rapidly evolving, highly competitive marketplace

I can not think of one operation on our farm that has not in some way been developed or improved by the research community, and much of their work has positively impacted virtually every painstaking step we take to bring the fruit from tree to table. We have unique insight into the value of research to our industry given our location in Geneva and proximity to Cornell University's applied research station. The resulting exposure from this proximity has positively impacted everything we do from selecting varieties to how we plant, nurture, harvest, package and sell the fruits of our labor.

Federal investment in specialty crop research over the years has unfortunately been limited and more recently in decline. Federal farm policy should re-emphasize the need for significant investment in specialty crop research and development in order to assist fruit and vegetable producers remain competitive in what has been a rapidly evolving and highly competitive global marketplace. Of particular interest to us as apple growers are **research programs** that improve rootstocks and varietal selection, production efficiency, fruit quality, and address other challenges to the future competitiveness of the industry. We additionally support proposals to mandate an emphasis on specialty crop research as part of the **National Research Initiative (NRI)** and to establish **grant programs within USDA** with the goal of improving the efficiency and competitiveness of specialty crop producers.

It may all be for naught...

While I recognize immigration issues do not fall under the jurisdiction of this committee I would be remiss if I did not take the time to comment on the issue of immigration reform and specialty crop agriculture. If in the process of securing our borders, which our industry favors, we do not develop a workable guest worker program for agriculture the time spent here will be for naught because our industry will cease to be viable. This, as I see it, is the greatest immediate threat to my family's farm. Furthermore, I believe this country is completely unaware of the repercussions for our national security of moving our fruit, vegetable and other intensive labor crop production to foreign countries.

Conclusion

The 2002 Farm Bill was a refreshing start in the right direction for specialty crop producers. It is my hope that the unified voice you hear from the fruit and vegetable sector will have an even greater impact in 2007.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and I hope your itineraries allows time to explore the bounty of this productive and fruitful area.